

General Order

Houston Police Department



ISSUE DATE:

August 17, 2020

NO.

600-32

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 600-32, dated August 16, 2012

SUBJECT: RIDE-ALONG PROGRAM

POLICY

The Houston Police Department's Ride-Along Program shall provide opportunities for citizens, civilian employees, and law enforcement personnel to accompany Houston police officers on duty.

This General Order applies to all employees.

1 GENERAL PROVISIONS

Individuals requesting to participate in the Ride-Along Program must obtain approval from the concerned host division commander before participating in a ride-along. Additional approval requirements are noted in this General Order for annual ride-along authorizations and for select Air Support Division ride-alongs. All ride-along approvals shall be made on a case-by-case basis.

Guest participation in the Ride-Along Program is dependent upon the availability of qualified host officers. If host officer participation is limited, requests shall be prioritized in the following order:

- a. Individuals with a mission specific need.
- b. Employees who need the experience to better perform their job function in the department (e.g., emergency communications personnel).
- c. Criminal justice students and potential police recruits.
- d. Citizens or volunteers involved with criminal justice activities such as the Positive Interaction Program (PIP), Houston Citizens' Police Academy, Police and Clergy Alliance, Independent Police Oversight Board, or Grand Jury, as well as members of the media.
- e. All other requests.

To participate in the Ride-Along Program, guests must meet all program criteria and complete all pertinent forms. Officers (host or participant) and civilian employees participating in the Ride-Along Program shall not have any pending or sustained disciplinary actions classified as category B or higher within the last three years.

Age

No person less than 16 years of age shall participate in the program. See section 2, *Ride-Along Authorization*, of this General Order for restrictions if the participant is less than 18 years of age. Permission to ride in a Houston Police Department helicopter or other aircraft shall not be granted to persons less than 18 years of age.

Citizen Attire

Comfortable business attire is required (neckties are not recommended). No shorts, jeans, tank tops, beach clothing, or similar attire are allowed.

Citizen Observer Card

Each citizen ride-along guest shall be issued a Citizen Observer card. The card shall be worn by each guest and shall be visible to the front at all times. Cards can be obtained from the host division shift lieutenant.

Guests who are approved for ride-alongs in an HPD helicopter or other aircraft are not required to display a Citizen Observer card.

The host officer is responsible for:

- a. Obtaining a Citizen Observer card for the guest before the ride.
- b. Returning the card to the host lieutenant after the ride is completed.
- c. Reporting a Citizen Observer card that is lost or damaged during the ride as if it were an official police identification card.

Criminal History Check

All persons requesting to participate in the Ride-Along Program as guests shall be checked through NCIC, TCIC, SETCIC, and local records for criminal and warrant history. Citizens who are 16 years of age shall be checked by the Juvenile Division.

Persons having a final conviction of a Class B misdemeanor or higher offense shall not be allowed to participate in the program. Any person with outstanding warrants shall be handled as required by law.

Implied Police Authority

No police powers, implied or real, shall be given to civilian employees or citizens unless normally granted by federal or state laws.

Ride-Along Originations

All ride-alongs, including those with the Air Support Division, shall originate and end at the host officer's police station. No other location shall be accepted unless approved by the host commander or exigent circumstances exist.

2 RIDE-ALONG AUTHORIZATION**Ride-Along Form**

Citizens and off-duty civilians participating in the Ride-Along Program shall complete the *Houston Police Department Authorization to Participate in the Ride-Along Program and Release of*

Liability form (Ride-Along form) available on the department's Intranet Portal. Only Houston police officers and on-duty civilians are exempt from filling out this form. Once approved, this form shall be valid only for the dates specified on the form.

The *Ride-Along form*, if required, shall be completed by the guest and notarized at least 48 hours prior to the scheduled ride-along. After the form has been notarized, the *Police Department Information* section of the form shall be completed and signed by the host division shift sergeant and lieutenant. If approved, the host division commander shall sign the form.

If the participant is less than 18 years of age, a parent or legal guardian must also participate in the ride-along. The parent or legal guardian must complete both:

- a. The *Parent or Legal Guardian Information* section of the guest's *Ride-Along form*.
- b. A separate *Ride-Along form* for themselves, signed, notarized, and authorized as stated above.

These parents or guardians shall be under all requirements and restrictions as if they alone were participating in the program.

Distribution of the Ride-Along Form

The *Ride-Along form* shall be distributed in the following manner:

- a. The original form shall be maintained by the division hosting the ride.
- b. A copy of the completed form shall be provided to the guest.

Annual Ride-Along Form

The following persons may apply to participate in the Ride-Along Program on an annual basis by completing the *Houston Police Department Annual Authorization to Participate in the Ride-Along Program and Release of Liability form (Annual Ride-Along form)* available on the department's Intranet Portal:

- a. Police and Clergy Alliance (PACA) members
- b. Independent Police Oversight Board (IPOB) members
- c. Other persons as authorized by the Chief of Police

If approved, the executive assistant chief of Field & Support Operations shall sign the form. The form shall be valid for one year from the date the form is approved.

Distribution of the Annual Ride-Along Form

The *Annual Ride-Along form* shall be distributed in the following manner:

- a. The original form shall be maintained by Field & Support Operations.

- b. A copy of the completed form shall be provided to the guest.
- c. The guest shall provide a copy of the completed form to each police station at which the participant performs a ride-along. These forms shall be maintained by each division hosting the ride-along.
- d. PACA ride-along participants shall also deliver a copy of the completed form to the Clergy Liaison Unit in the Employee Services Division.
- e. IPOB ride-along participants shall also deliver a copy of the completed form to the department's liaison for the Independent Police Oversight Board.

3 WEAPONS AND FIREARMS

Civilian employees and citizens, even if they hold a license to carry a handgun, are prohibited from carrying any weapon or firearm while participating in the Ride-Along Program. See sections 6 and 7 of this General Order for exceptions.

4 HOST OFFICERS

Officer participation in the Ride-Along Program is voluntary. To participate in the program as hosts, officers must have at least two years seniority.

Officers with a ride-along guest shall notify the dispatcher they are a host unit when they sign on duty. They shall also indicate what type of guest is riding with them (e.g., officer, civilian, citizen, volunteer, PACA or IPOB member, minor with parent or legal guardian).

Host officers shall not volunteer for an overtime assignment unless an emergency exists. Host officers shall not exchange ride-along guests during their shift. Guests shall remain with their host officer for the length of the ride-along assignment (see section 10 of this General Order for exceptions).

5 HOUSTON POLICE OFFICERS AS GUESTS

Houston police officers who want to ride as guests shall make arrangements with and obtain the authorization of both their commander and the host division commander. Officers shall wear the department's official uniform when participating in the Ride-Along Program, regardless of assignment, with the exception that no conducted energy device (CED) shall be allowed in any HPD helicopter or other aircraft for any reason.

Any Houston police officers authorized to ride as guests while on duty shall be considered on temporary assignment.

6 REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORABLY RETIRED OFFICERS AND ACTIVE OR RETIRED JUDGES

Ride-along guests who are honorably retired police officers or active or retired judges shall complete the appropriate *Ride-Along form*. During a ride-along, these participants may carry a weapon except as restricted by section 12, *Air Support Division Ride-Alongs*, of this General Order or unless prohibited by state or federal law.

7 REQUIREMENTS FOR OFFICERS FROM OTHER AGENCIES

The approval of the host division commander is required for officers from other agencies to participate in the Ride-Along Program. Guests who are certified, full-time peace officers from other agencies must complete the *Ride-Along form*. Such participants shall be considered citizens and are subject to the guidelines and restrictions outlined in this General Order.

It is requested that guest peace officers from other agencies within the state of Texas wear their official uniform, but it is not mandatory. If, however, these officers wear their official uniform when participating in an HPD Air Support Division ride-along, they shall not carry a CED on any HPD aircraft for any reason. These officers shall retain all their powers and privileges as peace officers unless prohibited by state or federal law.

Unless it is necessary, Houston police personnel shall refrain from using other agency personnel in a manner that shall require them to return at a later date to appear in a judicial proceeding.

When a peace officer from another agency wants to participate in the Ride-Along Program, the host division commander shall ensure a courtesy call is made to that officer's supervisor to obtain both of the following:

- a. Verbal permission from the officer's supervisor to participate in the program.
- b. Verbal confirmation that the officer does not have any serious pending or sustained disciplinary actions.

8 CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE RESTRICTIONS

Civilian employees who are directed to participate in the Ride-Along Program for the benefit of the department (e.g., improvement of job performance) shall be considered on duty and on temporary assignment. They shall follow the same instructions listed for Houston police officers in section 5 of this General Order. Civilians not assigned a uniform shall dress according to section 1, subsection "Citizen Attire" of this General Order.

Civilian employees who volunteer to participate in the Ride-Along Program shall be considered off duty and shall not be compensated or entitled to workers' compensation benefits for the ride-along. Off-duty civilians shall not wear their assigned uniform, but shall dress according to section 1, subsection "Citizen Attire" of this General Order. Off-duty civilians shall be considered citizens for the purpose of this General Order.

For additional restrictions see section 9, *Duties and Restrictions*.

9 DUTIES AND RESTRICTIONS

Civilian and citizen ride-along participants are required to obey lawful orders of police officers and may be denied access to crime scenes. Civilian and citizen ride-along participants are subject to the following duties and restrictions.

Duties

Ride-along guests may be used to fulfill various duties as determined by the host officer. These duties may include:

- a. Traffic or crowd control (if the ride-along participant is in a uniform).
- b. Radio operation.
- c. Motorist assistance.
- d. Gathering information or completing routine paperwork that shall not be used in any court action.
- e. Protection of a crime scene (if the ride-along participant is in a uniform).
- f. Acting as an interpreter.
- g. Being listed as a witness to an offense.

Restrictions

Unless an unavoidable emergency exists, civilian and citizen ride-along guests shall not be allowed to:

- a. Conduct criminal or witness interrogations or interviews.
- b. Participate in an arrest or be left in charge of a prisoner.
- c. Accompany an officer inside any structure where a suspect may still be hiding.
- d. Leave the police vehicle unless otherwise directed by an officer.
- e. Assist at a crime scene except as specifically directed by an officer.
- f. Sign any report (e.g., arrest, incident, crash), traffic citation, or other legal document.
- g. Provide cover or back-up.
- h. Drive any City of Houston vehicle.
- i. Ride with any Vice, Narcotics, or Criminal Intelligence personnel.
- j. Ride in the prisoner compartment with a prisoner being transported in a vehicle.

- k. Receive any information concerning the timing or details of a warrant execution.
- l. Utilize an audio/visual recording device unless authorized by the host officer or another section of this General Order.

Officers shall deny ride-along participants access to scenes or situations inappropriate for their age (e.g., bar raids and scenes of violent acts).

10 HIGH-RISK SITUATIONS DURING RIDE-ALONGS WITH CIVILIAN OR CITIZEN GUESTS

In the event of a high-risk call during a ride-along, the host officer shall leave a civilian or citizen guest at the nearest police facility. If the incident warrants an immediate response, the host officer shall leave the guest at the first convenient and safe location. If the guest is released, the host officer shall promptly notify the dispatcher of the situation. The dispatcher shall immediately assign a unit to retrieve and transport the guest back to the host officer's police station. After the incident has ended, the host officer and the guest can resume the ride-along.

If a high-risk situation is unavoidable, the guest shall remain in the police vehicle until police personnel advise the situation is safe. The host officer shall make every effort to ensure the safety of the ride-along participant.

If a host unit initiates a pursuit, the dispatcher shall immediately assign a replacement unit. When that unit arrives, the host unit shall turn off its emergency equipment and fall back to a safe and prudent position. The host unit shall not assume the position of secondary unit even if a secondary unit is unavailable.

If a citizen or civilian employee is injured or exposed to a high-risk situation during a ride-along, the host officer shall report the incident to a supervisor, who shall complete a *Significant Event Report* form.

11 MEDIA GUEST REQUIREMENTS

Authorization for members of the media to participate in any aspect of the Ride-Along Program may be granted by only the Chief of Police and must be coordinated through the department's Office of Public Affairs. Additionally, in order to participate in the Ride-Along Program, members of the media shall complete a *Ride-Along form*.

Persons presenting credentials identifying themselves as members of the media are permitted to utilize audio/visual recording devices during any authorized ride-along.

12 AIR SUPPORT DIVISION RIDE-ALONGS

The division commander of the department's Air Support Division may authorize helicopter or other air support ride-alongs requested for any of the following:

- a. Classified or civilian employees with a mission specific need.

b. Other law enforcement agency officers with a mission specific need.

Additional written authorization is required from the assistant chief over the Air Support Division when the air support ride-along is requested for any of the following persons:

c. Classified or civilian employees without a mission specific need.

d. Other law enforcement agency personnel without a mission specific need.

e. Citizens.

Once a helicopter or other air support ride-along has been approved, personnel and passengers shall follow the detailed Air Support Division standard operating procedures (SOPs) regarding the requirements for passengers prior to any flight.

Unless otherwise restricted by the host division, all ride-along participants are allowed to utilize audio/visual recording devices during helicopter or other air support ride-alongs.

No CED or incendiary or spark-emitting device shall be allowed in any HPD helicopter or other aircraft for any reason.



Art Acevedo
Chief of Police